Athlete charged after photos show crime

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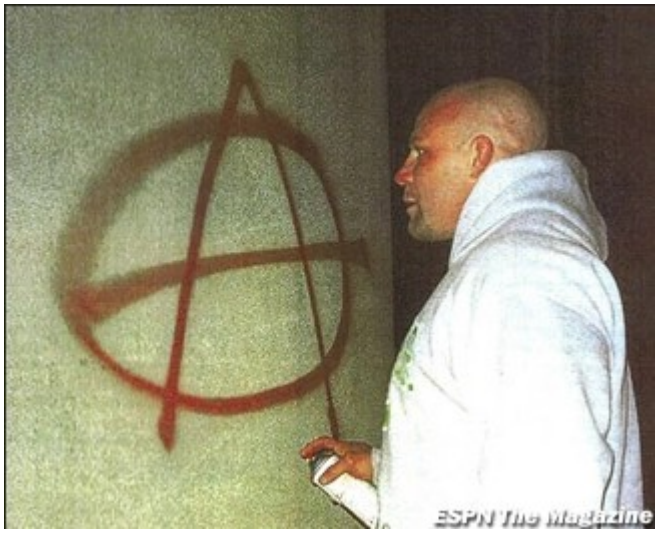

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OLYMPIA — Prosecutors have charged Olympia mixed-martial-arts champion and avowed anarchist Jeff Monson with first-degree malicious mischief based on photographs published in a December edition of ESPN The Magazine that showed him spray-painting an anarchist symbol on the state Capitol, court papers state.

A warrant for Monson's arrest was filed Wednesday in Thurston County Superior Court. Monson, 37, is charged with first-degree malicious mischief, a felony carrying a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a $20,000 fine.

The graffiti cost $19,000 to clean up, court papers state.

Police have sought the people responsible for spray-painting graffiti on columns on the north side of the Capitol on Nov. 26. The graffiti included anarchy symbols, a peace symbol and phrases such as "no war" and "no poverty."

According to court papers, a State Patrol and an Olympia police detective recognized Monson as the source of the graffiti on footage captured by a camera at the Capitol, but the break in the case occurred after ESPN The Magazine published an article on Monson Dec. 29.

A photograph of Monson leaving graffiti on the Capitol was included with the article, court papers state.

“In full the caption above the picture reads: ‘On a recent night in Olympia, Monson suddenly pulled out a spray can and tagged the state capitol (sic),’ ” court papers state.

Monson, an Olympia native and Timberline High School graduate who was on the wrestling team at Oregon State University, left a job as a mental-health counselor to pursue mixed-martial-arts fighting.

In December 2004, he won the Cagewarriors Fighting Champion heavyweight title in Sheffield, England, by defeating Tengiz Tedoradze with a submission hold in the first round.

On Dec. 13, 2008, he won a match against Ricco Rodriguez in an event in Miami. Monson’s fighting nickname is The Snowman. He is listed as the world grappling champion.

Reached by telephone Wednesday, Monson, who is out of state, took responsibility for the graffiti. He said that it had a point: to protest the war in Iraq and economic inequality at home and abroad.

“Every great movement in the United States, from civil rights, women’s rights, the labor movement, has been the result of people standing up and breaking the law, refusing to stand at the back of the bus, refusing to stand aside when the government asks you to get off their property,” Monson said.

“And now, these people are seen as pioneers. But at the time, they were criminals — they were literally criminals. I’m not here to advocate for myself; at some point you have to stand up.”

Monson, who said he participated in protests at the Port of Olympia in November 2007 and in other protests against the Iraq war, said he wants to make his political beliefs known.

“When a country’s committing an illegal war, you’re not supposed to stand aside,” he said.

Monson said he had heard only 20 minutes earlier that the State Patrol was looking for him in Olympia. He said he was going to contact the Patrol.

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